

## All Natural Pain Relief

Vioxx was a very popular prescription pain medication taken by an estimated 20 million people. In September 2004 however, it was pulled from the market because a study found that its use increased the risk of heart attack and stroke. On Friday August 19th, 2005, a jury held drug giant Merck & Co. liable in the heart-related death of a 59-year-old marathon runner who took Vioxx, slapping the company with a \$253.4 million judgment. The Vioxx scandal was only the beginning. Since taking it off the market last year, numerous questions have been raised about other popular prescription and over-the-counter pain medications. In short, they could be extremely dangerous. Thankfully there are safer, natural pain relief alternatives though...

**White Willow (Salix species) (bark):** The bark of the stately white willow tree (*Salix alba*) has been used in China for centuries as a medicine because of its ability to relieve pain and to lower fevers. Early settlers in America found Native Americans gathering bark from indigenous willow trees for similar purposes. The active ingredient in white willow is salicin, which the body converts into salicylic acid. The first aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) was made from a different herb containing salicin—meadowsweet—but works in essentially the same way. All aspirin is now chemically synthesized. It's not surprising, then, that white willow bark is often called "herbal aspirin". Although white willow is the species of willow tree most commonly used for medicinal purposes, other salicin-rich species are employed as well, including crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), purple willow (*Salix purpurea*), and violet willow (*Salix daphnoides*). These all may be sold under the label of willow bark.

**Health Benefits:** The salicylic acid in white willow bark lowers the body's levels of prostaglandins, hormonelike compounds that can cause aches, pain, and inflammation. While white willow bark takes longer to begin acting than aspirin, its effect may last longer. And, unlike aspirin, it doesn't cause stomach bleeding or other known adverse effects. White willow bark may help to relieve acute and chronic pain, including arthritis pain, headache, back and neck pain, muscle aches, and menstrual cramps. The effectiveness of white willow bark for easing these and other types of discomforts results from its power to lower prostaglandin levels. Some arthritis sufferers taking white willow bark have experienced reduced swelling and inflammation, and have eventually achieved increased mobility in the back, knees, hips, and other joints.

## About the Author

Natural disasters are extreme, sudden events caused by environmental factors that injure people and damage property. Earthquakes, windstorms, floods.

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